

LOADSTAR LETTER #17

October 1994 Companion newsletter for LOADSTAR #127
"Real News! We Speak Commodore!"
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Making Midi Music That People Will Want To Hear

by Jeff Jones. In today's fast electronic world, high quality music can often be composed, edited and performed at the desktop in record time, thanks to MIDI. Consequently what is known as "typical computer music" can be realized in record time. Thanks to MIDI, it's out there, and in numbers you wouldn't believe. You can download "awesome fantastic" MODs that are at best the same music you heard in old computer demos. The ironic thing is that most of this bad music can be cleaned up quite easily. If you own a PC of any type, and a MIDI interface, you now have the power to create rich, professional music at home, indistinguishable in quality from the masters of electronic synthesis. Even with the simplest sequencer and the most mediocre mid-level synth, you can elevate your music above the typical. Once you clear that hurdle, you certainly won't want to reenter the "typical" domain.

Consider the following caveats, but ignore them when applicable. The number one rule in creativity is that every rule was made to be broken.

Is It Done Yet? Your music must be polished. In all areas of art and production, both computer and real-world, this is what separates true artists from dabblers. If you hear a note off key, you must fix it. If a beat is missing or doubled where you didn't intend, you must go back and fix it. Smitten by a young woman, Kenny G went on to record *Songbird* overnight on his 8-track home studio. Maybe he got it all right on his first try. We don't know, but a Kenny G most of us are NOT! Contrary to the beliefs of all our supportive friends and spouses, most of us are not musical geniuses, and even true geniuses work late into the night.

Your computer gives you the ability to edit and refine, to mute a track and try it a different way. Even if you're not a genius, with a little tenacity, you can eventually carve out the masterpiece you want. In fact if you don't do just that, you'll end up with a sketch of an album that only you enjoy. Other people may say, "It sounds professional," or "I can't believe you did that at home!" However everyone knows it doesn't belong on a store shelf. You must not allow your mind to bridge the fine line between *almost done* and *masterpiece*. You must be your own worst critic, especially when you have the power to change your music for the better. You can add too many tracks, but you can't over edit.

Speak Of The Devil, Is It Soup Yet? A common pitfall of the MIDI composer is *Everest complex*, where the artist adds track after track simply because the channels and the voices are there. Well 32 voices, no matter how beautiful, rarely sound beautiful when they aren't in harmony. While each track may be flawless, what you end up with is a cacophony of melodies and rhythms. This can happen sooner than you think. Any good song can be one track away from becoming a jumble of gratuitous ditties. In your mind's ear you may want that one more supporting melody, but it transforms your music into noise. In the old days we couldn't or wouldn't do this because equipment with the extra tracks was too expensive or added too much hiss.

Now, with sequencers and software tracks, you have the power to go overboard, and when you do, people can hear it loud and clear.

Maybe you can include the extra diddy in a short bridge, or in a canon as the song fades out. Go pull out your favorite records and CDs. Listen to the melodies and note how simple the tunes and the backgrounds are. The melodies support themselves and stand out as the theme.

Track Levels: Recording all tracks at full blast is a no-no. This is the same as recording all tracks at the mid level or the lowest level. Nothing stands out unless by luck the patches are programmed at proper levels. Important melodies will become drowned out by background. If your hardware allows you to change relative levels of channels after recording, that's great. If not, you might want to check into a sequencer like Dr. T's Keyboard Controlled Sequencer, which allows MIDI mixing by way of software. It also records your adjustments in real time.

Is It A Recording That Other People Want To Hear? The musical joke is alive and well in America. They are clever little mathematical melodies that perhaps can't be perceived as melodies until a moment of revelation. Trouble is, no one but the composer wants to hear them. Even your spouse hesitates to acknowledge these pieces. Give a stranger a tape with these compositions on them and they consider it fast forward material. It's all right to be distinctive, to be innovative, but if you have to press pause and explain it to the twisted faces of your listeners, it's just not working. "No, you have to listen to it!" is the signature of a bad composition. Unless your musical joke is catchy, it's a joke.

Don't Force A Composition. If it bothers you, you're probably right. Maybe your inspiration is coming in sections and you have to wait on the second installment. Put it on the backburner. It might just be that you don't yet have the proper equipment, voicing or effects to realize the piece.

Don't Get Lost In The Patch. The fantasmagorical patch-from-space that your favorite artist used was effective, but not overpowering. Often a composer may fall in love with a dreamy patch and overuse it. Officially "space music" is supposed to be difficult to make. Weird sounds went over well back when people hadn't been exposed to them much, but if you're attempting to paint some sort of dreamland with a tapestry of digital effects, try throwing in some real music here and there. If you don't, your listener is more likely to say, "That's a bunch of noise!" than "Listen to that dreamy patch!"

The Other Side: During the 80s, it was deemed anathema to sound like a synth, and everyone wanted a grand piano sound when samplers and sample-playback keyboards hit the scene. It became all-important to sound "real" even though you were totally electronic. That's okay, but don't limit yourself. Synthesizers are legitimate instruments and thus sounds that are particular to synthesizers are legitimate sounds. You might even notice synths playing along with orchestras in today's soundtracks, which is great because a synth is a real instrument. Classical composers would have renounced God

for one.

The Piano: If you must have piano solos, make sure your sample of a piano is a good one. The human ear can instantly identify even an 8-bit sample as a piano, but it can also instantly identify poor quality. When you're playing that piano sample in the music store, it's going to sound better there than in your recordings. One thing to look for in samplers and sample-playback units is *multi-sampling*. This means that one sample isn't stretched across all octaves and velocities. If you're going to record a real piano, do you have a good microphone(s)? I'd suggest reading up on it.

On Improvisation (Voice And Music): Don't ad-lib unless you have a knack for it. PRACTICE ad-libbing. Believe it or not, Johnny Gill recorded 24 tracks of ad-libs for "My, my, my" and only the best ad-lib track was chosen. Now when he "ad-libs" that ending, it's rehearsed. Though I've seen the masters ad-lib great music on stage, art doesn't usually just fall together. Masters simply have more tricks to pull out of their hats. I have heard work from serious synthesists that sounds as if they were beating on the keys with spatulas with no particular regard for rhythm. Some may argue that these diversions are the purest form of artistic expression, but so are many punishable crimes. Listen to the ad-libs of the greats and note that they are still musical.

The Oldest Trick In The Book: Quantization is the process of having the computer correct "errors" in timing. For as long as I can remember, I've heard the warning not to over-quantize. This stands, but don't under-quantize either. Only the best musicians have perfect timing. Quantization is a viable and even necessary tool. The tracks you shouldn't quantize are your chords and expressive melodies. Especially in chords, you may strum three or four keys, each striking a fraction of a second after the other. Your hands are that accurate, your listener's ears are even more accurate and they may appreciate it. If you quantize that chord track to the nearest *nth* note, those notes may all strike at the same time. Even worse: most may strike in groups. Your rhythm, whether percussive or tonal, may need quantizing. I personally keep away from auto-quantizing (quantizing as you record). You may record the track and find that it doesn't need quantizing. Quantize your bass drum and main percussion unless they clearly don't need it. Do this early to avoid recording eight tracks that are respective of a failed beat. That might be a mess that can only be cleaned by muting tracks and re-recording them one by one. One thing you might do is use the metronome feature of your sequencer. If your sequencer doesn't have

one, it's easy to create a throwaway metronome track, recorded in step-time or recorded in real time then quantized.

Effects And Quantizing: You can't quantize a track where you've used the pitch or modulation wheel. More than this, if you play with keyboard pressure a lot, that track can't be quantized -- unless some bright software author has come up with an algorithm that quantizes with option of ignoring effects (hint hint). You can't quantize effects because your MIDI device doesn't send effects data rhythmically. When invoked, pitchwheel, modulation, and other effects data are transmitted real time and continuously. All you did was bend a pitch wheel, but your keyboard is sending thousands of bytes to your sequencer as fast as your sequencer can record them. The resolution of your clock determines the resolution of your effects information. For instance if your clock/tempo is set for 60 CPS (counts or clicks per second), there could be 60 separate effects events recorded for every second of effects performance -- along with your melodic data. It used to be you'd be warned that effects eat up memory, but if you have a one meg machine (today's standalone sequencers and workstations are *many* megs), and the entire song isn't a pitch bending fest, don't worry about it.

There's an easy way to quantize tracks that have effects applied to them. First record the track without effects. You may have to turn an imaginary pitch wheel to do it in the spirit that you want. Once your recording is done, open another track on the same channel and set it to record. Now while you're listening to playback, turn that pitchwheel. Play with keyboard pressure. To some it may seem unnatural or unbelievable that the keyboard is sending MIDI information when you're not playing notes, but it can. Your melody track is free to be quantized and edited without affecting the effects. More than that, your notes aren't hidden in a sea of effect events when you go to edit them. You can also record and edit program changes on "effects tracks" like these. Your program may allow you to merge the tracks but I wouldn't suggest it unless you're running out of track space.

Recording More Than Your Performance: MIDI mixers are normal line mixers that can send and receive MIDI signals. So while you're panning left and right, your sequencer can record your mixing performance and recreate it. Great idea, right? Well if you have reasonably modern equipment, you may already have the ability to record pans and volume changes if your unit sends and obeys these changes. Every MIDI synth I've purchased since 1988 has had console control over the stereo image of each voice and naturally some sort of volume control for each channel over and

above velocity. Chances are you can easily set up a "mixer track" on your sequencer and record yourself changing the values of pan and volume. If you're using a tone generator, which is usually only on the receiving end of MIDI signals, you'll need to connect it's MIDI OUT to your sequencer's MIDI IN.

You can also record smooth velocity changes as you record simply by using keyboard controls as you play and record. If the melody you're playing is too involved, have a spouse or a friend manipulate the keyboard controls as you play. Be sure to turn off applicable MIDI filters so that the data is received by your sequencer.

Ramping: Your sequencer may allow for "ramping" sections of your song so that a track gradually fades in or out. If you don't have this feature, you can still do it. Through direct editing, you can create exacting fade-ins and fade-outs by first determining the start of the fade and the end. Next just count the notes and come up with a factor to increase or decrease by. For instance if there are thirty notes in the range and you want to fade from a velocity of 90 to 0 (fade out), just edit each note so that it has a velocity 3 less than the previous.

Second Oldest Trick In The Book: Artificial Echoes: Today's sequencers offer algorithmic echoes. You press a note once and the note is repeated by your sequencer a pre-determined number of times, each time at a lesser velocity. This provides for a clean effect since the you're not routing it through an effects processor. If your sequencer doesn't offer this effect, you can do it manually, by playing as if there is an echo and go back in the edit mode and decrease the velocities of the echo notes.

Squeezing Out Extra Effects: Many of today's tone generators and keyboards offer built-in effects, but most only offer one effect for the entire multi-setup, and you'll probably choose one of the reverbs. When you try the more exotic pans and early reflections, it's fine for one of your tracks, but not smeared across all of them. If you're using a reverb, but need ping pong or reflections for a single track, it's probably not out of your reach. By using multiple tracks, you can do reflections and pans. Just record the track as normal and duplicate the track (your sequencer will have this function or at least a cut and paste) and change its MIDI output channel to one of your unused ones. Set up another channel on your hardware, preferably panned in the position of the original track. It can be the same sound patch or a different one. Now shift the track up 1/32nd note and play it back. If your synth allows it, shift the pan for that track, too. Now you have an exacting digital delay, and a pan. Do this as many times as needed until the effect is

rich enough. Don't go overboard with the delay. This may seem heaps of trouble, but it gives you much, much more power over ping pong and reflection effects than even the most expensive sound processor. Understand this: *there is no degradation in sound when you do manual effects like these. No added hiss. No cables.* It only does it at the price of channels. With today's 48+ channel MIDI, you can explore this effect to the hilt and finally put those extra tracks to use without cluttering your music.

Random Pan: If your synth has it, try it out instead of slapback and pan reflections. You may get the effect you want without affecting parts of your music that are best left to simple reverb or no effect. When used in conjunction with reverb, random pans are natural sounding -- and it only uses one track.

So let's get out there and squeeze some extra sound out of our units, and make some good music while we're at it. And, hey hey! Let's be creative out there.

Sale of Commodore's Assets Delayed Again

By Dan Stets, Philadelphia Inquirer Knight-Ridder/Tribune Business News PHILADELPHIA--Nov. 7--The long-delayed sale of the remaining assets of Commodore International Ltd. has been put off once again. The holdup is raising concerns among users and supporters about whether Commodore technology has a future. While other computer companies are racing to make advances on the information highway, Commodore's flagship Amiga computer seems stuck in a roadside ditch. The situation is particularly

poignant for Amiga users - and they are an ardent group - because the computer once was the leader in the multimedia technology now being emulated by Apple and by makers of IBM-compatible computers. The latest disappointment for Amigas came Friday, when the liquidator of Commodore's assets failed to sign an agreement with the apparent buyer, a management team from Commodore's United Kingdom subsidiary. "Regrettably, we have had some delay, and what we hoped to happen today is not likely to happen," Franklyn Wilson, the chief liquidator of Commodore's assets, said Friday. "I can't get any more specific than that," said Wilson. "We hope to get it done very shortly," he added, echoing a refrain he has used since mid-July. Commodore, which based its North American operations in West Chester, Pa., was incorporated in the Bahamas, where it filed for liquidation in early May. Wilson had hoped to present the Bahamaian Supreme Court, which is supervising the liquidation, a signed agreement with the U.K. subsidiary by Friday. The U.K. team and the liquidator supposedly came to terms early last month, and only a few details remained to be worked out by the lawyers for the two sides. "It's a big deal, it's a complex deal," said Colin Proudfoot, a managing director of the U.K. subsidiary and a leader of the buyout effort. "I think it will be resolved in a matter of weeks, but I've been saying that since April," Proudfoot admitted. The company announced its intention to liquidate in April. The U.K. team's chief competitor, Creative Equipment International, of Miami, now may be the initial winner of the competition. Creative

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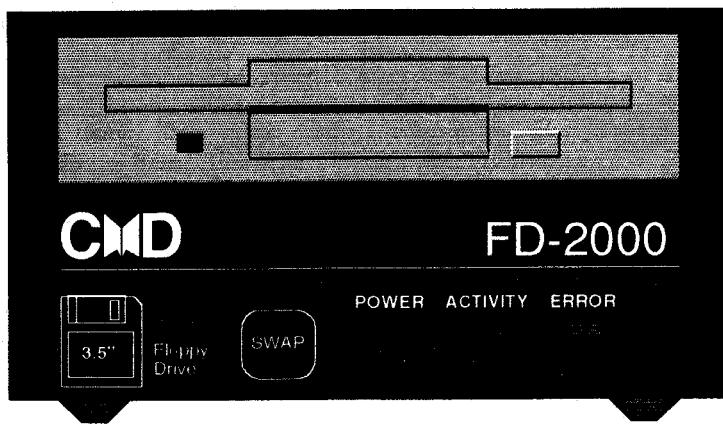
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Equipment president Alex Amor said Wilson is flying from the Bahamas to meet with him today to discuss details of a possible agreement. He said Creative may sign an agreement to purchase Commodore's assets as early as this week. "We don't feel we are too far off center right now," said Amor. "If we can get a few points negotiated, I think we can move forward on it." But even if Amor is able to sign a deal this week, the process is far from over. Once an agreement is signed, the liquidator will present the deal to the Bahamian Supreme Court. The court then intends to let other suitors attempt to outbid the apparent winner. Among those invited to bid would be Commodore U.K., presuming Creative Equipment signs the deal, as well as others which have expressed interest, including Samsung Electronics, of Korea; Philips Electronics, of the Netherlands; Amstrad PLC, of the United Kingdom; and Escom AG, of Germany.

It is not yet clear how long that procedure would take, although the liquidator has promised it would be as soon as possible after the first deal is signed. The unusual bidding procedure was designed to assuage Commodore's American creditors, who wanted the bankruptcy proceeding conducted in the U.S. Bankruptcy Court in New York. The liquidator is trying to assure the creditors that he got the highest price possible and to dissuade them from trying to block a sale in the New York court. Amor maintains that Creative Equipment was always the highest bidder, but that he held back to allow the U.K. group to sign an agreement. He then could have seen their terms and outbid them before the court. That strategy changed, however, last Monday when the liquidator sent Creative Equipment a 97-page sales contract for Commodore. The liquidator requested that Creative sign the deal by last Wednesday, but Amor said he was not prepared to act quite so quickly. He also expressed frustration that process had taken so long. "I think as every week passes the value of the company goes down," said Amor. "The sad part is that people are forgetting about Amiga." At this point, it is not entirely clear why the procedure has taken so long. David Pleasance, another managing director of the U.K. team, has one possible explanation: Commodore's assets were so spread out among subsidiaries around the world that it has taken the liquidator months to figure out what is available for sale. But the U.K. team offered no explanation as to why it had not been able to finalize the deal. Meanwhile, those who know and love the Amiga have been suffering. "We think the Amiga market is deteriorating very rapidly," said Larry Bennett, an owner of Expert Services Inc., of Florence, Ky., an Amiga dealer near Cincinnati. "We think in another month there is not going to be any market at all because everyone is going to dump their Amigas," he said. If something isn't resolved this month, Expert Services is going to stop selling Amigas, he said. Wayne Steele of Advanced Computers Inc., in Jackson, Wyo., another Amiga dealer, said that the delays are killing the Amiga. "It eventually will come to the point where it doesn't matter who signs the agreement, there won't be anything left for them to do," Steele said.

Thomas Hillman, executive vice president of Scala Inc., said his software company has already begun to work on software using IBM-compatible personal computers. It had been dedicated to software for Amigas. He predicted that Commodore's whole distribution network will evaporate by early next year unless there are new products. His company and others will be sorry to see the Amiga disappear, he said. "It had a very elegant technology and architecture," he said.

Genie To Provide Full Internet Access By Year End

ROCKVILLE, MD, October 17, 1994 -- GEnie announced today its plan to release Phase I of its Internet Access Service by year-end 1994. The GEnie Internet Access Service will enable subscribers to access the wealth of information and numerous

discussion groups available on the Internet from GEnie.

Phase I will provide GEnie subscribers with access to:

* The FTP Service which provides users with interactive access to any of the millions of files available for public access on the Internet.

* Usenet Newsgroups Service which allow users to participate in the global discussion areas collectively known as USENET.

* Outbound Telnet Service which enables users to connect to other host computers through the Internet.

* Gopher Service which is a set of menus designed to help users access files, discussion groups and other host computers in a more orderly and logical fashion.

* Wide Area Information Server (WAIS) Database Service which provides users with access to "no cost databases" across the Internet.

GEnie will also establish a GEnie Information Server, accessible to Internet users interested in learning more about GEnie Services. Pricing information, access numbers, a list of services, and details of special offers will be available, as well as a signup module.

GEnie Services, which became operational in 1985, is one of the leading online information services with subscribers throughout the United States, Canada and around the world. GE Information Services, Inc., a division of General Electric Company, is headquartered in Rockville, Maryland.

* RoundTables are GEnie's special interest areas. Each RoundTable includes a bulletin board, software library and Real Time Conference.

GEnie Services hourly non-prime time connect rate is \$3.00 U.S. (\$4.00 CAN\$). The monthly fee of \$8.95 (\$10.95 CAN\$) includes up to four hours of non-prime time access to most GEnie services such as software downloads, bulletin boards, email, an Internet mail capability, multi-player games and chat lines. Contact: Vivian Kelly (301) 340-4494

From: TRHOWES@DELPHI.COM@INET00#

To: LOADSTAR Online Support

Sub: Internet Use

From TRHOWES@delphi.com Sun Oct 30 02:06:15 1994

For approximately six months I have been on two BBS services, Genie and Delphi. Genie is best for conferencing and Delphi has full internet capabilities. What do I use the internet for? First I have a very huge thirst for knowledge. I am a very avid reader and the internet is full of interesting areas for reading. I am able to research various articles concerning special areas like health care and law.

When the comet struck Jupiter I was able to read and download information concerning the events as they happened. These article were posted by NASA and included GIFs and plenty of text for general reading. I have a general interest in artificial intelligence. I have been able to keep up on developments in this area through using the internet. I have been able to use Jughead, Veronica and other methods to search for articles concerning all areas of interest. I saved myself the time and cost of a patent lawyer by searching the patent office library for my idea. I found that it had already been invented so I must now think of another idea. But my trusty Commodore computer saved me big bucks. I have used the internet to send E-mail to friends all over the world saving the cost of stamps and paper. Most days you will find me on the computer logged into the Internet doing some browsing for information to enrich my life. I have also helped friends by researching background on various colleges and universities they were interested in attending. I work in television news and the internet and other areas in the bulletin boards has helped me. The boards have kept me up to date on all areas that I must be up to date on. I find that without the internet and other areas I would not be able to understand the complexities of the modern world.

I use *Common Sense* by Commodore for my modem software. I use a 1670 modem set for 1200 baud. I log on to

Delphi BBS and after the main menu type "go internet". Delphi uses a Unix shell and Unix commands. They are hard to remember at first but with time get easier. When I see the main Internet menu it contains 18 items. These range from "Personal Favorites" to the "World Wide Web". At the bottom of the menu is the following "Enter Item Number,?, or Exit":. Personal Favorites is item #1 of the menu. This area allows you to save areas of the internet that really interest you. This allows you to travel to these places without having to go to a specific menu. I generally go to item 18 it is "The Grab Bag" it lists all new www and gopher sites. Along with new gopher sites and the www are new telnet site. This gives you a chance to see what is new without searching. When the Whitehouse went on the World Wide Web. I got the address from the local paper entered it and was there within seconds. If you are at a dead end and find it hard to return to the main menu. All you do is type "top" and you will be there no matter where you are on the internet. Since all of Delphi Internet is menu driven it is very easy to use. This also keeps problems to the minimum. Regardless if you are a first time user or ver experienced Delphi is very good. (should be very before experienced). For those who have been on Q-Link this is the best place to go to for C-64 users. I am using a C-64c with a 2meg ramdrive by CMD. Two drives 1541-II and a CMD FD-2000. Commodore 1670 modem and a Panasonic 2023 printer. I also have a CMD SmsrtMouse for Geos and other programs. The monitor is a Commodore 1701 color. This complete outfit give me total access to the internet and other areas.

I have found that if you need to find something the internet is the first place to look. I went searching for a job for a friend of mine and found one in California for him but he decided to stay in Massachusetts. I have been able to answer legal questions and check the references of a lawyer before engaging their services. I have researched and found answers to medical questions before going to the doctor in order to ask the right questions and get the right answers. Any college or high school student has via the internet total access to encyclopedias or huge libraries and never leave home. It is better than American Express, Visa or Mastercard because the interest rate and card costs are either zero or minimal. You can go shopping on the internet for just about anything you can think of and pay for it also without ever leaving home. It is possible either by menu or telnet to access areas of the world before taking a vacation. This will allow you to see what you will need and possible costs before going on that long awaited vacation. I use it to check the weather in various areas before traveling because it is always being updated. Also I do not have to wait for tv or radio to tell me what the weather is before traveling. They have too many commercials and programs before the weather comes on. I have traveled either by telnet or menu to other countries and never left my computer or the internet. If you are an individual that needs information for work or just general interest then the internet is for you. I highly recommend service like Delphi and any other that has full internet access. whether you use and IBM or a Commodore or even a MAC, you can visit

the internet and use all that it has to offer. I would like to thank Jeff Jones and Loadstar for allowing me to be extremely verbose. Truman R. Howes Arlington, Mass Loadstar User and Internet Surfer

Art Contest Announcement

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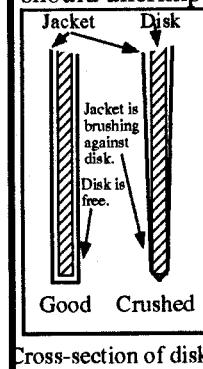
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